

**OFFICE OF
THE COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS**

2d MARINE DIVISION ASSOCIATION BANQUET

**REMARKS BY
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COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS**

CAMP LEJEUNE, NORTH CAROLINA

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GENERAL JAMES T. CONWAY: Well, folks it's great to be with you here, down East. The Sergeant Major and I have spent the entire week visiting our Marines and Sailors at our eastern bases and stations. And let me tell you, they are in great shape.

Folks, it's always good for a speaker to know his audience. That being said, I wonder if you would do something for me. I would ask — and I hope I'm not superseding anybody here — but I would ask all those Marines who served in World War II to please stand, so we know who you are. Marines who served between World War II and Korea. Marines who served in Korea. Marines who served in what we call the Cold War period, that is to say between Korea and Vietnam. Marines who served in Vietnam. Marines who served between Vietnam, let's say, and Desert Shield, Desert Storm. Last to stand up these Marines who have served your Corps since Desert Storm, please stand. Thank you, folks. It's a pretty big span, isn't it? A lot of different folks from a lot of different backgrounds in here.

I'd like to just quickly touch on three things tonight. First I want to say thank you, I'd like to inform or update you on a few things, and probably want to ask you for something tonight as we are all here together.

First of all, I think that Marines represent the warrior class of this great Nation. This is a wonderful country, and through all those periods you have helped keep this country strong, at a time, in a lot of instances, when nobody else was willing to step up and do that.

Ronald Reagan said, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed off to them to do the same." And I think that's exactly right. You folks have added luster to who we are. In your time in the Corps — in virtually every one of those engagements when our Corp went on the offensive — it was Marines like you that led the charge. And without fail, we have been that outfit that is the first to fight. You have produced sons and daughters. Who, if they didn't become military people themselves, have carried forward your values and have been the staunch group of individuals who have supported our Corps and indeed our Nation.

As you heard the chaplain talk about tonight, you have carried forward the names and the memories of your shipmates who couldn't be here. I've talked to a lot of people in the 2d Marine Division Association and the 1st Marine Division Association and they will say to you that we are not the heroes. The really brave ones never left the island or never left the reservoir.

The fact is, you all have not allowed them to be forgotten. That is a marvelous thing and I think that's all that those people looking down from Heaven would ask and we salute you for that. In fact, all those things that you have done for our great country have caused our young Marines today to look to you as their model. They are making every effort to live up to the legacy that you folks have established and to be as good today as you were in all those periods that we represented earlier.

I want to make you aware of some things. Today's generation is a great young generation. There was a time when we doubted that. There was a time, not so long ago, when some of us with silver hair sat down and said, you know, we're worried that what we call the joystick generation might not have what it takes to be good Marines or Soldiers, Sailors, or Airmen.

We felt like perhaps there wasn't enough discipline, not enough outdoor activity, and perhaps not enough physical sports — those kinds of things. Ladies and gentlemen, we could not have been more wrong. I have seen these young men and women in combat. Their sense of self-sacrifice, their raw courage, their team playing is absolutely incredible. It brings tears to your eyes to watch them out there. And it is my belief that our Corps, indeed our country, is going to be in great shape for a long time to come as these people assume positions of increasing responsibility.

You know, let's talk some about where we think we're going to go in this Corps of ours. We asked some people at Quantico some months ago now to tell us what the world would look

like in 2020 or 2025. I'll share with you some of their views — I think it's really quite interesting.

First they said that the demographic changes that we see taking place today are going to alter the world as we know it and the world that we all studied in school. There is a silent invasion taking place. The industrialized nations have an increasingly aging society. The non-industrialized nations have an increasingly younger society — and a lot of those people without jobs. That creates the potential to generate tremendous friction.

They tell us that by 2025, 70 percent of the world's population will live within 30 miles of the seacoast in what we call urban sprawl. They tell us that oil will still be the stuff that we use to grease our machines. We will attempt to develop alternative means, but they won't be nearly mature enough to be in major use by then.

By 2025, water will be as important as oil. Nations will flat go to war for a fresh drinking supply for their populations. Today something approaching 40 percent of the nations are already water stressed.

They tell us that we could have a near-peer competitor arise out there — another major nation that we might have to fight — but the most likely occurrence is what they called hybrid warfare: Third World nations or non-state players with sophisticated weapon systems like we saw in '06 with the Hezbollah and the Israeli army — a political party that can destroy ships at 12 miles on the horizon, or the equivalent of an entire battalion of Israeli tanks with these fourth-generation systems.

They tell us that United States will still be an incredibly powerful country in 2025, but not as powerful on the world stage as we are today and have been. It will be a much more multi-polar world; and that a rising China, a resurgent Russia, the power of India, and the collective power of the European Union will challenge us and we're going to have to learn to live with it. It will be a different world from what we know today.

So, how does the Marine Corps respond to all of that? Our belief is that we must become, what we call, a two-fisted fighter. We have got to be able to operate in that hybrid environment which may be towards the low end, but we also have to that forcible entry capability. We have to be able to go both ways and that's the force that we're attempting to build today.

Now, we've been authorized to grow the force and that's a good thing. We've been authorized to add some 27,000 additional Marines. Our initial plan was to do that over a five-year period. We thought that we could do that over five years and not impact quality. What we discovered is that our recruiters are even better than we knew. We needed 5,000 that first year; they gave us 7,000. We programmed 5,000 the second year; they gave us 12,000. And, frankly, we're going to close out that growth in half the time that we planned; we'll close out that growth in just a couple of months this year — 96.3 percent high-school graduates.

It is the cream of America. The Sergeant Major and I had a conversation, I guess, about three visits ago in Iraq with a young man at the mess deck in Ramadi. We said, why did you join the Marine Corps, son? He's from Iowa, no salt water in Iowa. He said, well, Sir, and pardon the language – I'll quote him – he said, Sir, I was 11 years old when they attacked the Towers and, quite honestly, I was scared. I had no idea that we could be hit that hard and in that many places. By the time I got to be 13, I was pissed off. Now I'm 18, and I'm doing something about it. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is typical of those young men and women that we see out there that seek to wear our uniform.

Now, we also have had some really incredible retention. Our recruiters — I want to correct something you may have read — our recruiters are not offering large bonuses. They're not offering a \$40,000 college education or a \$30,000 small business loan. They're offering a title — Marine — and a dress blue uniform that hangs in the window. Those are the kind of people we seek and those are the kind of people that we're getting.

Our retention again has been wonderful; we even reached out to our retired — both officers and enlisted — and we said, you know, if you're interested in going to Afghanistan and you can still see your belt buckle, send me a postcard; maybe we'll find a job.

You may be wondering how this new administration is going to see your Marine Corps; we think really quite well. We think that our expeditionary nature, the ability to be fast, austere, and lethal, if employed, is going to be attractive. I think that based on what Sergeant Major and I have both heard, President Obama is going to look to engage; when an engagement fails, you need to have a capability to back that up. And we think that we represent some of that capability.

The Marine Corps takes 6 percent of the Department of Defense budget. And for that 6 percent we give back a great deal of the Nation's military capability: on the ground, in the air, in the attack helicopters that we fly. Whether you're Republican or Democrat, we are a good deal, and we think that that's going to be well-seen. We think that the administration believes as we do, that it's time for the Marine Corps to turn out the lights and close the door in Iraq, run up the victory pennant and call it a success and refocus our efforts on Afghanistan.

Ladies and gentlemen, nobody has slapped the table, even as of today's meeting with the Sergeant Major, but I think sometime very soon you are going to read about a brigade of Marines — 13,000 Marines, air, ground and logistics — in Afghanistan probably by the middle of the year. We think that that's a necessary evil. We think that that's something that needs to be done so that we can continue this fight against the extremists in this global war on terrorism.

I want to ask you tonight for something before I sit down. One is that you continue what you're doing as the 2d Marine Division Association in taking care of our Marines and their families. It's a wonderful thing and it's inherent to this concept of family that your president talked about. I ask that you assist our recruiters. We say that every Marine is a recruiter's assistant. Years ago the recruiters would tell you that it took four hours to talk to the young prospect and about four hours to convince his family that it was the right thing to do.

Today it's four hours and 14 hours – and you all can be very instrumental in influencing the influencers in your local communities. We say that we make Marines, win battles, and create quality citizens. You people are all of those things, and you are in positions of responsibility out there to help us influence those people about the way of life the young may want to choose.

We ask that you let the Marines in your unit know how proud you are of them: they seek that, they need that, they want to hear that because, again, you are their idols. You are the people they are trying to be like. And that kind of respect given to them in return is just an incredibly marvelous thing.

And lastly I ask that you, as U.S. citizens, support what your Nation is doing, as we close out Iraq and as we move into Afghanistan. It will take a while and we will need following behind what's taking place there as a Nation, not just to persevere, but to win; that's what this is all about.

Let me finish with just a quick story. In Fallujah back in 2004, we had an embedded reporter with us, in one of our 2d division battalions, as it turns out. And this young man was with our Marines in the city for a period of three or four days and he wrote his wife an e-mail and he said, you know I'm getting to know these kids and we're not so much different. We talk about football teams; we talk about fast cars; we talk about women; and I'm not so much different from these guys.

On the fourth morning, machine-gun fire broke out just as they were having breakfast. Every Marine in the room grabbed his helmet, grabbed his rifle, and dashed outside. This man was right behind them with his camera.

They got to the sidewalk and they went right towards the fire. He got to the sidewalk and he froze. And he said, he got down behind an old rusty car and nothing he could do would allow him to move his legs to follow those Marines because he said, I had a vision of a man with a high-powered weapon trying to shoot me in the face, and I don't understand how those people did that, how they do that as a matter of routine.

Well, what he doesn't understand, because he's not a Marine, is that there's an element of pride. Every Marine thinks that his squad, his platoon, his company, his battalion is the baddest guy in the valley. He also knows there's a reputation there that goes every time the enemy fire cranks up. He doesn't understand that Marines fight for their buddies. And if your buddy is taking fire, that is where you want to be. And, lastly, he probably doesn't understand that so long as our countrymen are behind us, we can go anywhere and we can do anything.